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Imperialism

Its Meaning

.. AND ..

Its Tendency.

CITY BRANCH PAMPHLETS.

THE purpose of the City Branch in publishing these pamphlets is to supply from inside the Party the literature which the Branches use for propaganda and other purposes. Part of the profits are to be handed over to the funds of the National Administrative Council.

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IMPERIALISM.

Its Meaning and Its Tendency.

CITY BRANCH,
THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY,
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May, 1900.

“States, which ambitious minds with blood do raise,
From frozen Tanais to sun-gilded Gange,
Gigantic frames, held wonders rarely strange,
Like spiders’ webs, are made the sport of days.”

DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN.

“The government of a people by itself has a meaning and a reality ; but such a thing as government of one people by another does not, and cannot, exist. One people may keep another as a warren or preserve for its own use, a place to make money in, a human cattle farm to be worked for the profits of its own inhabitants. But if the good of the governed is the proper business of a government, it is utterly impossible that a people should directly attend to it.”—JOHN STUART MILL.

“To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers, may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers, but extremely fit for a nation whose government is influenced by shopkeepers. Such statesmen, and such statesmen only, are capable of fancying that they will find some advantage in employing the blood and treasure of their fellow-citizens to found and maintain such an empire.”—ADAM SMITH.

“Free nations cannot govern subject provinces.”—J. A. FROUDE.

HAD any one ventured ten years ago to say that the steady development of home politics would be interrupted at the end of the century by a wave of Imperialistic sentiment, he would have been a wise man, but few would have believed him. If the prophecy had been made, however, a good many reasons could have been given for believing in it.

THE GENESIS OF PRESENT DAY IMPERIALISM.

Mr. Kipling had arisen, and his peculiar faculty as a rhymester had enabled him to write sacred hymns and drunken songs with equal facility, and so to appeal to chapel and music hall, the moral and the brutish forces of the country, alike; a new literature of animal power and barbaric romance had sprung up; the capitalist was gaining a greater hold on the Press than ever he had before; a class of South African mining lords was buying its way into social influence; there was no body of political principle and no firm democratic conviction to maintain moral law and order in the minds of the people. The military and Imperialist invasion which came upon us under the guise of Jubilee celebrations was not resisted. Toryism found it to be advantageous that the wage-earners should be proud of our government of Egypt rather than critical of our administration of the East End of London, and Liberalism, a drowning man, was too eager to clutch at any straw. As in the days of slavery, "holy men gave Scripture for the deed," and there were leaders of Christian politics who rose from a study of the Bible with no other text in their minds than "Sufficient unto the day is the *evil* thereof," and went and formed a new Holy Alliance between the Alhambra and Empire Music Halls and the West London Mission. The Jameson Raid happened, and whilst the people turned to indulge in a few weeks of righteous indignation, the Countesses and English smart Society were busy conspiring against the law of the

country, and attempting by secret and personal influence to subvert the ends of justice.

Whilst this was going on at home, an unfortunate series of harassing episodes with France was playing into the hands of the Imperialists, and so, when Mr. Chamberlain's diplomacy embarked us upon war, the flood of Imperialism which was let loose instantly submerged every other political consideration.

The movement was conducted by business men and for business ends, but the masses were taken upon their moral and sentimental side, and so it was no mere political fervour with which we were faced in the early days of the war, but a revival of a nationalist religion like that of Judaism, with a Lord of Battles at its head and a Chosen People as its votaries. The subsidised newspaper Press quoted Scriptures in its leading articles, and gave great prominence to letters written, as usual, by missionaries, the paid servants of the God of Love and the Prince of Peace.* The people worked themselves into the mood of the soldiery in *Anne of Geierstein*, who, as Ital Schreckenwald reported to his mistress, declared "that they will maintain peace with God and war with all the world."

WHAT IS IMPERIALISM?

We must define what is the meaning and scope of this word Imperialism. One set of politicians say that it means nothing more than the drawing of our Colonies closer to the Mother Country. To attach no more meaning than that to the word is an abuse of language. Imperialism is a world policy, and not merely a Colonial policy. It implies that in our relations with other States we are to be guided not so much by the ideals of co-operation as by the assumptions of superiority; it inevi-

* "My conviction is that the missionaries have done a great deal of mischief by their exaggerated statements, and have greatly helped on the war" [Zulu].—Cox's *Life of Bishop Colenso*, II., p. 518,; also pp. 685-689.

tably leads to territorial expansion and to an increasing burden of political responsibility over native races. It is because the ordinary man in the street puts all that meaning into it, that he gets into such raptures over it. It could not supply the force and prejudice to political life which it does unless it meant to the average man a big ideal of an England chosen by its virtue to hold a commanding position amongst the peoples of the earth.

IMPERIAL FEDERATION.

But even as a Colonial policy, Imperialism is crudely ineffective. Imperial Federation would give the Colonies a fuller sense of independence and liberty, and thus far would benefit them. But Imperial Federation is not approved on this account, but because it is supposed to be a way of uniting the Empire. That, it will not do; it will very likely do the opposite. In whatever form it comes, it will give to the independent interests of the colonies new importance. We shall then hear less of the Empire, and more of Canada, or New Zealand, or South Africa, and a great danger will arise that a purely sectional view of Imperial interests may secure the support of the might and the arrogance of the whole Empire.

The bonds of family relationship which bind us to Canada, to New Zealand, to Australia, to South Africa, are more than political, and can be strengthened in a great many wiser ways for themselves and us than by a federation for military and aggressive purposes such as may follow the Rosebery agitation.

If our people are anxious to honour the colonies, the Socialist can claim that he was honouring them long before some of our present-day Imperialists knew that they existed. There has been no more enthusiastic student of Colonial legislative work than the Socialist. He was the first to make their political experiments known in the Mother Country, the first to

welcome them as equals in democratic government, the first to pay them the homage of imitation. He required no war and no catch-penny Press to reveal to him the virtues of his kith and kin over the seas.

IMPERIALISM AND CIVILISATION.

In insisting that a wide meaning should be given to Imperialism, we are but following "the man in the street." And the sentiment of the Imperialist man in the street is not altogether wrong. If a nation is to do any good in the world, it must, like an individual, believe that it has a mission. There is such a thing as the responsibility of a State to the world just as there is a personal responsibility to the State. But when the Imperialist applies this sound doctrine in national ethics, he makes two fundamental mistakes. He assumes, in the first place, that the Imperialist nation has a right to determine its own sphere of action in the world, and, in consequence, that it has a right to assign to other nations their spheres. This is the source of those national complications and ill-will which follow in the train of Imperialism. However much we may be persuaded that we are a Chosen People, other nations naturally refuse to take us on our own estimate or to value themselves according to our judgment.

In the second place, the Imperialist assumes that a nation can fulfil its duty to the world best by interfering politically here, there, and everywhere. By far the greater number of people who imagine that Imperialism can be part of a genuinely progressive creed do so because they believe that civilisation follows the flag; and their belief is worthy of consideration. Can civilization be taught?

Civilization is a growth. The religion, the history, the circumstances of a people determine it.* You cannot

* "Civilization is, as it were, the ocean which receives the wealth of a nation; and in whose bosom all the elements of the life of a people, all the resources of their existence, are gathered together."—Guizot, *Lectures on European Civilization*, p. 8.

carry it about with you. The civilization of an Englishman in India is not that of London. A western civilization cannot be imposed on an Eastern, or a Temperate upon a Tropical, people. We can no more send our civilization to Central Africa than we can send our climate there.*

But it is not only impossible for one nation to civilize another by governing it; it is wrong that it should attempt to do so. For there is not only one good civilization but many. If we can imagine a Great Britain of 5,000 years ago, inspired by a Rosebery and supported by powerful armies, spreading civilization all over the world, what a barren record would the history of mankind be to-day! None of those blendings of culture which took place in Alexandria at the dawning of the Christian era would have been possible. Conquest may have opened up one civilization to another in times long antecedent to the steam engine and a world commerce, but to-day its only effect is to crush out and level down all national life to the dead uniformity of an alien political routine.

But when the Imperialist talks about "civilization," he often means nothing more than "law and order." Although he says that we have spread "civilization" in India, Egypt, and elsewhere, all that he means is that we have put an end to lawlessness and disorder, to the authority of petty factions and to unstable government.

But the importance which the Imperialist places upon our success in imposing our political notions upon unsettled countries, shows how much he misunderstands

* "The higher being is not, and cannot be, a model for the lower; he could not mould himself on it if he would, and would not if he could. Consequently, the two races [of India and England] have long lived together, 'near and yet far off,' daily seeing one another and daily interchanging superficial thoughts, but in the depths of their mind separated by a whole era of civilization, and so affecting one another only a little by comparison with what might have been hoped."—Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 145.

the nature of civilization and of democratic government. To tell blood-curdling stories of the cruelties of the Khalifa in one breath, and announce in the next that a certain tourist agent can now take you in Pullman cars luxuriously up to Khartoum, appears to be a triumph in government. In one sense it is—but in a minor sense. For, when one country imposes a law and order upon another country, the stronger nation must show that its discipline has an educational effect, that it is leading the subject nation up to a full measure of self-government.* When ever has British control resulted in that? It never has, and it never will. For, however good an imposed order may be, the subject people will always exaggerate its drawbacks and minimise its benefits. If the conquered nation is docile and obedient, its national initiative dies out and further progress becomes impossible; if it is active and clings tenaciously to its own line of development its government is not an education but a conflict between rival social ideals and dissimilar stages of civilization.

THE CASE OF EGYPT.

The British occupation of Egypt is cited as the best example of a benevolently imposed foreign law and order. And no doubt it is. But what is really happening in Egypt? When we went there in 1882, we believed that our presence would have such immediate and beneficial results that, in a short time, we could leave the Egyptians to govern themselves. And yet, we are not out of the country, and few believe that we shall ever get out. We are still in Egypt, not because we capriciously or wickedly

* "The test of a truly liberal policy should be that it tends eventually and in the long run, to put the people of India in a position to manage their own affairs."—Morison, *Imperial Rule in India*, p. 2; cf. also J. S. Mill, *Representative Government*, ch. XVIII. To the Socialist, 'self-government' means something more than liberty to do what a nation likes. The 'self-government' of the natives must be accompanied by measures protecting them against the designs of financiers and traders.

changed our minds, but because, in so far as we were guided by the Imperialist idea that one country can impose a political order upon another for that other's good, we were started upon a never-ending task. Our governing Egypt has done more than the Pachas to unfit Egypt for governing itself.* The Pachas were corrupt, unjust, tyrannical; they oppressed the people and brought Egypt to the verge of bankruptcy. We have readjusted taxation, we have established security of property, we have done away with a great deal of the old dishonesty in the Government. But our "order" has lain more heavily upon the national life of Egypt than the exactions of the Pachas. If we withdrew our army of occupation to-day, to-morrow there will be anarchy worse than could have followed the triumph of Arabi.† The *pax* and *jus Britannica* involve the ruin of every robust national characteristic. England is not to blame; the blame is with the idea that we can go about the world establishing law and order for the good of distressed communities. The real lesson of our marvellous work in Egypt is, that whilst one nation may impose a system of law and order upon another, the result is not an extension of the area of civilization, but an increase in the number of dead nations. A nation can be established in law and order at too great a cost.

* "How is it possible that the country should govern itself when only English are allowed to govern it?"—G. W. Steevens, *Egypt in 1898*, p. 75.

† An evidently well-informed writer in the *Contemporary Review* for March, 1895, says: "English reforms, as things are at present, would all vanish on the day of departure of the British army. . . . So long as England neglects to educate the Egyptian in English modes of thought and action, the edifice of reform she has been slowly and painfully building up in the Valley of the Nile will prove to be a mere house of cards." But as to the effect of teaching the young Egyptian English, see G. W. Steevens's *Egypt in 1898*. See also Theo. Morison's *Imperial Rule in India* for the results of the same experiment in India.

 IMPERIALISM AND DEMOCRACY.

Hence it is that Imperialism, sane and insane, Jingo and anti-Jingo, is one and the same thing. The only difference between the Jingo and the "sane" Imperialist is that the former knows his own mind and something of the influence of the Imperial idea in history, whilst the latter knows neither his mind nor his history. Imperialism means the constant extension of territory, whether we like it or not, the continued subjection of peoples whether we intend it or not.

This raises a grave question for the Imperial nation if it pretends to be a democracy. Is it possible for a self-governing people to rule a subject race and yet keep its own love for liberty? Neither the Greeks nor the Romans could do it, and we are not doing it very well ourselves. The reason is obvious. No nation can play the part of the despot (even the benevolent despot) abroad, and that of the democrat at home. When a democracy becomes responsible for the government of a weaker race and attempts to take upon its own shoulders that responsibility, it has to sanction acts like the desecration of the Mahdi's dead body and the suppression of Philippine independence, and it has to put itself so absolutely in the hands of the so-called "expert" person, who is in every case a bureaucrat, that it is doing violence to the human instincts and the political principles upon which it exists.

IMPERIALISM AND MILITARISM.

In addition to that, Imperialism and Militarism must go hand in hand. The acquisition of territory and its defence when acquired, have turned Europe into an armed camp.* Our own military expenditure is also going up as our Imperial responsibilities increase. Even before the war broke out, our Army was costing us twice as much,

* For cost of European armies and the increase of the conscription drafts, see *Statesman's Year-Book*, Macmillan, 10s. 6d.

and our Navy three times as much, as they did fifty years ago, and at the present moment we are adding to their cost at the rate of over two millions per annum, exclusive of loans for military works. America is in the same position. After its war with Spain, when it launched into Imperialism, it raised its standing army from 25,000 to 100,000, and voted £5,000,000 to build twelve extra ships, exclusive of the cost of armour and armaments.

It is easy to see how all this will end. Now that the military status of our Empire has been challenged, compulsion will have to be resorted to to maintain the military reserve which will now be necessary to secure the tolerable safety of our Imperial fabric. Already we are hearing proposals to establish the most pernicious form of compulsory service—the military training of school children. Let us have anything but that. It will poison our citizens from their youth up. But conscription we are bound to have in some form or other if the present Imperialist craze becomes a settled national policy.

The greatest evil of Militarism, however, is not its cost but its influence upon industry and government. It gives the soldier a more important place in national life than the citizen, with results which have been most eloquently brought out in France by the Dreyfus affair. Since the present war, a Dreyfus case is much more likely to appear on this side of the Channel than ever before. If we allow the military function to become of supreme importance in the State by pursuing a national policy which necessitates that the boundaries of our rule should bristle with bayonets, industry and citizenship will no longer determine the course of government.

Just in proportion as the attention of an electorate is turned away from the questions of domestic politics of which they have experience, and is centred upon policies and acts which they must judge by hearsay evidence, so does democratic vigilance disappear and a class of demagogues and of privileged persons dispute between them-

selves for the government of the country. Duty, like charity, begins at home, and if the civilization of the blacks is to be purchased only by the destruction of our own democratic spirit, the balance to the world is of evil, not of good.*

IMPERIALISM AS AN INDUSTRIAL POLICY.

There is another view of Imperialism expressed with brutal candour by Mr. Rhodes when he said that the flag was our best commercial asset. To the British working man, that defence of Empire is contained in the assertion that trade follows the flag. Trade does no such thing. Trade follows business enterprise.†

* The attempts of the Liberal Party to-day to gain some measure of their lost influence by associating themselves with Imperialism, only repeat history. That policy was adopted after 1859, when, by a combination of Imperialist Liberal and Imperialist Tory, Lord Palmerston was kept at the head of the Government. Miss Martineau's summing up of the consequences is an interesting comment upon the line of argument taken in this pamphlet. At Palmerston's death in 1865 she wrote: "We find ourselves adrift without party, principle, or purpose by which to direct our thought or our action. . . . At the moment, we find ourselves with . . . no statesman to guide our destinies, and with no such political training as is needed to bring out such statesmanship as may exist, or to supply its place if absent, with *the conscience, the earnestness, the thoughtful habit and the temper of deference to human nature and human interests*, which go far to supply the need of genius for public affairs."—*Biographical Sketches*, 1852-1868, pp. 152-3.

† See an article on "Does Trade follow the Flag?" by Lord Farrer, in the *Contemporary Review* for December, 1898. The following figures, extracted from the statistical abstract, are interesting, and their meaning is self-evident:—

	1884-87.	1888-91.	1892-95.	1895-98.
	£	£	£	£
Germany	28,000,000	29,750,000	30,000,000	33,000,000
France	22,500,000	23,750,000	20,250,000	20,000,000
Do. Senegambia	142,000	121,000	286,000	459,000
Canada	9,000,000	8,750,000	7,750,000	7,000,000
Australia	25,500,000	27,000,000	19,000,000	23,650,000
Brit. India	31,750,000	33,500,000	28,500,000	26,350,000
Totals:—				
Foreign	194,750,000	220,250,000	203,500,000	205,670,000
Colonial	84,500,000	92,250,000	83,500,000	89,350,000

It is impossible for the most hardened Imperialist to squeeze patriotism out of these figures.

The extract from Adam Smith with which we begin this pamphlet gives the opinion of our greatest economist on Imperialism as a trade policy. But two further points need mentioning. In the first place, the most promising attempt ever made to secure open markets has been by America in China, and America has been successful where we failed because, unlike us, it was able to persuade both China and Europe that it had no Imperialistic ambitions in the Yang-tse-Kiang Valley.

In the second place, if our manufacturers are encouraged to shirk the difficulties of producing for the civilized markets and are to look to semi-civilized peoples to consume British produce, the skill of our artisans will be lowered, the quality of their work will suffer, and their standard of living fall. Imperialism is indeed a policy of industrial deterioration, and by impoverishing the skill of the country and encouraging the worst forms of financial capitalism, must crush out every budding hope that labour has of becoming economically and politically free.*

If, however, it be true that national trade is threatened, the Socialist has not only foreseen such a possibility, but has his remedy for the consequences. A great deal of our resources is wasted; good acres are lying barren; natural advantages are neglected; unnecessary burdens are borne by labour; vast wealth is held by those who have done nothing to create it. If the home market were

* There is one argument specially addressed to Socialists which may be dealt with in a footnote. "Socialism is the stage after Capitalism," it is said, "and therefore Socialists should support every movement which increases the Capitalist empire." The reply to this absurd notion is, that Socialist conditions need not be preceded by Capitalist conditions. For instance, the main effort of Capitalism in South Africa has been to break up a system of land tenure which could have been made a basis for Socialist experiment straight away. (See article in *Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1898, on Bechuanaland, by the Rev. John Mackenzie. See also *The Soul of a People*, by H. Fielding.) Moreover, the Capitalism of Imperialism is established under conditions which make further evolution impossible. Capitalism in uncivilized countries is permanent. It cannot grow into Socialism.

properly cared for, trade would prosper; and if the community would take over the natural wealth of the country and use it for the common well-being, there would be enough and to spare for generations to come.

But the Socialist is also aware that the exchange of commodities between nation and nation must be encouraged. Now, nothing is more apparent than the failure of the individual trader competing against the world to carry on foreign trade. This is proved by the constant appeals made to the Government to utilise our consular system for trading purposes. The progress of events is showing that unless the Government helps the trader with reliable information regarding foreign markets and further organises the consular service as a trading agency (an application of the principles of Socialism), our foreign trade will be ruined.

SOCIAL REFORM, IMPERIALISM, AND SOCIALISM.

It is, perhaps, provoking to Socialists that their propaganda should be interrupted by the cross currents of foreign politics. But as it has been so interrupted, let us stand intelligently upon our principles. We are no spent Liberal Party casting about for a cry to catch votes. We have an opinion, and it is our business to make the people share that opinion with us, whatever electoral result that may mean at present. In standing as we do for domestic reform first, the greatest menace of Imperialism to us is the pseudo-social reform which it will promote. A part of the Imperialist spirit is a sentimentalism which inclines it to favour a reforming philanthropy. But a Workman's Compensation Act and a Housing Bill (even if they were of much more practical value than those two measures of the present Government are), when given as a sop or in pity, are of no value whatever as steps to a more complete control by the people of their lives and the wealth they create. There was a flood of social reform when Athens was at its Imperial

zenith. But it was not the social reform of progress which a free people executes of its own initiative. The social reform of Imperialism is either a species of political bribery as it was in Athens, or a species of aristocratic philanthropy as it was in the mind of Disraeli and of the Tory democracy of to-day. Both are equally fatal to a State. The form of Socialism may stifle its spirit. Discontent can be satisfied without removing its cause, and it is upon that discovery that the classes of reaction are to proceed in their opposition to the movement of which Socialism is the high-water mark. They are very wise in their day and generation to begin their new move by so misleading the people regarding national greatness and the moral duties of our nation in the world. Thus will our attention be so distracted and our principles of democratic government so obscured, that we shall cease from troubling about further extensions of democracy, and come to regard with a vegetable satisfaction our lot as wage-earners in an Empire upheld by military force and governed by an aristocracy.

The principles which should guide us at the present crisis are clear. A people gain power and influence in the world in proportion as they solve for themselves the great problems of democratic self-government. We shall do more to civilize Africa by civilizing the East End of London than by governing from the Cape to Cairo. The union with our Colonies must be that of kindred democracies experimenting how to make the life of the people better; our responsibility for the weaker peoples must be that we protect them from our vices and guard them against those exploiting classes which are our own gravest menace; our place amongst the strong nations must be that of co-operative worker and honourable partner striving with them to promote peace and secure liberty and independence. Democratic civilization is a light inspiring the peoples of the world to follow, not a law compelling them to obey.

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